THE

Prophetic Function of Missions

A SERMON

PREACHED ON THE SEVENTIETH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

Congregational Home Missionary Society

AT

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT,

JUNE 2, 1896,

BY

DANIEL MERRIMAN, D.D.,

OF WORCESTER, MASS.

CONGREGATIONAL HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY,

BIBLE HOUSE, NEW YORK.

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THE PROPHETIC FUNCTION OF MISSIONS.

ACTS ii: 17.—"YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY."

IT IS significant that our Society should hold its first meeting in New England on this, its three-score-and-tenth birthday. It is even more significant that it should meet in this ancient ministerial town, and beneath the shadow of this great University, which has always given it loyal support and inspiration, and among whose officers and alumni have always been found many of its most devoted servants.

Under these favoring circumstances, it seems appropriate that my message should be to emphasize the Prophetic Function of Missions. Of course, the term prophetic is used, not in the limited sense of prediction, but in the broader, more original sense of discerning, interpreting and enforcing moral and spiritual truth. The prophet is the organ of divine revelation, the herald of divine commands, the mouthpiece of divine judgment, redemption and grace.

His supreme characteristic is that he experiences and incarnates the truth to which he testifies. He is no reporter of mere hearsay; no trafficker in tradition; no dealer in secondhand goods. He is a living epistle. He dwells in the life of which he speaks. Taught immediately of God, he imparts the teaching directly to others, by imparting himself. Institutions and apparatus he will use to extend and correct his vision, but he is not dependent upon them. To-day conservative, to-morrow radical, he constantly finds in the old, the new for present needs, and from age to age the truth and the life of God gain fresh investiture and significance at his hands.

The prophet is the greatest character both of the Old Testament and of the New. Indeed, if we assume, as well we may, that the title includes the lawgiver, the poet, the martyr, the reformer, the preacher, then the prophet is the mightiest and most hopeful figure of all history, the master of its secret progress, never failing in its darkest hour, independent, unordained, invincible.

> "This is he, who, felled by foes,
> Sprung harmless up, refreshed by blows:
> He to captivity was sold,
> But him no prison-bars would hold:
> Though they sealed him in a rock,
> Mountain chains he can unlock:
> Thrown to lions for their meat,
> The crouching lion kissed his feet:
> Bound to the stake no flames appalled,
> But arched o'er him an honoring vault."

In this wide sense of prophet, the humblest workman who, out of his own soul, rebukes his fellow for greed or blasphemy, and calls him to repentance and amendment of life, is partner with Lincoln

and Wesley, with Wilberforce and Milton, with á Kempis and Wickliff, with Paul, Isaiah, Moses and Christ himself. Such may be looked for at any time, in any station, of every language. In respect to the channel of his judgments and grace the Divine Spirit receives no prescriptions from man. Now he speaks through King David; again he calls Amos, the herdman of Tekoa, the dresser of sycamore trees. Who would have dreamed to find in the son of the rude miner of Eisleben, the creator of a new Christianity? Yet he was the very man. The taunting Pharisees said: "Out of Nazareth ariseth no prophet." It was precisely there that he did arise, to their confusion.

At Pentecost, prophesying as a personal realization of divine truth, with an inspired daring and definiteness in its proclamation, became the conspicuous vocation of the church. Like flowers in spring, it burst forth with exuberant accessories. Human lips at first could not contain the burden and bubbled over with mysterious syllables. Stephen, the first martyr, the convincer of the young Saul, rising out of the unknown, flashing his meteor-like interpretation into the heart of Israel's history, facing the blood-thirsty Sanhedrin with superhuman calmness of conviction, and dying in a vision of Jesus, was a brilliant example.

Everywhere prophesying is magnified as a chief department in the activity of the Apostolic Church, sharply distinguished by Paul from speaking with tongues, far above which it was exalted. Its predictive aspect is scarcely noticed; but, so far as it is mentioned, it is seen to spring naturally out of the clear experience of divine truth in all its relations, so that the time element disappears and the speaker has a prescience of things future, because he sees so truly things present. This superlative spiritual gift was, in those glowing years, widely diffused. We get hints that in any assembly might be heard such powerful declarations of the divine messages of redemption on the lips of obscure men, so personal, so energetic, so convincing that they wrought instant conversion in those who heard them.

But institutionalism is hostile to the prophetic office. The priest and the politician are always seeking to get the prophet under their thumb. History is in large part the record of their success—success of the machine, first using for its own ends, and finally endeavoring to suppress, the prophet. After Christianity and Paganism became allies in the person of the Emperor Constantine, there was for centuries little of the open vision of the Apostolic days. The church lived on its inheritance. Routine took the place of inspiration. But with the dawn of Reformation the old spirit of Pentecost returned. Men inquired directly of the Scriptures, of their own souls, of God, and testified fearlessly to one another of what they saw. This prediction of Joel, "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy," was again fulfilled through those fermenting centuries. Nowhere did the prophetic function appear more vigorously than in the English Puritan and Pilgrim. It was because they insisted upon religion as personal, moral, spiritual, that they were persecuted and exiled. In

England, in Holland, at Plymouth, in Massachusetts Bay, the root of everything about them, social and political, was the liberty of prophesying which they sought and exercised, though with the inevitable limitations, imperfections and inconsistencies of their age. They were God-taught, God-following, God-witnessing men. This accounts for their zeal for education. Prophets themselves, they were resolved to have schools of the prophets to perpetuate the line, so far as human wit can do it.

It is true that because of their geographical isolation this prophetic gift of our fathers got scanty room for a century or two, and so recoiled upon itself in the development of fantastical theologies, and just to relieve itself created one or two splendid heresies. Yet this theologic era was only the storing up of energy. It was really the heat of missionary zeal which was in the Congregational bones. When the child of the Puritan and Pilgrim realized that he was the possessor of half a hemisphere and a citizen of a world, then the prophetic genius began to get scope. It re-read its Bible and took prayerful counsel of its own heart. It enlarged its educational ambitions. Then it organized foreign missions. It testified against intemperance and slavery. It blossomed in literature. It planned and set on its feet, as the organ of moral and spiritual truth for a continent, the Society, whose seventy years of splendid, fruitful service we celebrate this week.

By birthright, then, we Congregationalists are prophets, preachers, teachers, missionaries. If we have any distinctive gift among the tribes of our modern Israel, it is here. By our heredity and genius we have a burden of the Lord. We are anointed for his testimony. St. Paul said: "Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the Gospel." We humbly say the same thing. Let others do the baptizing and magnify ecclesiastical machinery. We should be content if we may do the preaching with such breadth and pungency as to convict men. St. Paul said, when contrasting prophesying with the gift of tongues: "I had rather speak five words with my understanding that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." We agree with him. Let others speak with the tongues of a hierarchy, of liturgies, of denominational contrivance. It is all right There is room for them. They do their work and have their reward. Let us not envy, let us not attempt to rival them. But let us magnify our own traditional office. Let us make more powerful and luminous the great function of the prophet and preacher.

The heart of missions is here. A story to tell, a judgment to pronounce, a lesson to teach, a hope to offer, all so incorporated in the personality of the herald—that he is the story, the judgment, the lesson, the hope, to those to whom he speaks: this is the ancient and open secret, this the perennial power of missions. Nothing else can be substituted for this. Everything else—institution, system, polity, rite—is incidental and subsidiary to this. The less that comes between the soul and God the better. One man as preacher, another man as congregation, this is the one, old unimprovable device of missions.

Men who have seen God as Moses, as Isaiah, as Paul saw him, who have become acquainted with him, who hear him speak, and who, out of their own experience and by their own sacrifice, can make affirmation to others of the immeasurable depths of the divine purity, righteousness, and pity in Jesus Christ—these—ordained or unordained—are the true missionaries, the true prophets—I had almost said the only true Congregationalists. Every phase of modern society, every indication of Providence, every hint of our past and our future, every disturbance and development of the faith, make overwhelming the opportunity and demand for such to-day.

The extent of our Home Missionary fields calls for the magnifying of the prophetic function of the churches. The early disciples "went everywhere preaching the Word." It was their sole weapon. The word "everywhere" is thrilling. The fences were all down. The whole Roman empire had suddenly become their parish and responsibility. But the Roman empire, in its greatest breadth, was small in comparison with our domain, the magnitude of which cannot be realized even by the traveler when aided by all the maps and shrewd devices of comparison, which our clever Secretaries make. The bigness of it at all times confounds us. Yet to the true prophet it is an inspiration. He always wants elbow room. Like St. Paul, he longs to preach to "the regions beyond." He hungers for the horizon. These great States of the Interior and Middle-West that in their extravagant youth already hold the swarms of ancient kingdoms; these newer States that come dropping into the Union so fast that we cannot keep account of them—each one an empire in itself; these gigantic Utahs, New Mexicos, Arizonas and Alaskas, destined, when irrigating streams have been turned upon their torrid plains, and their mines, forests and rivers have been exploited, to sustain populations of inconceivable extent — these great areas, which in the impending years, must have everything educational, moral, religious, done for them—demand nothing so much, inspire no one so much as the prophet.

They are full of the promise and potency of every form of evil and good, struggling together for the mastery. The redundant, ambitious forces that develop there must be penetrated with the principles of a sound patriotism, morality, religion. Who shall do this but the prophet, deeply experienced in the truth and life of Christ?

It is not, however, the geographical extent of the country; it is the character and distribution of its population which peculiarly call for the Gospel prophet of righteousness. Till within one or two decades the foreign immigration to this country—which has always been the happy hunting ground of European peoples—was for the most part of a quality which rendered its assimilation easy. It was mainly Anglo-Saxon, Keltic, Teutonic, affiliated in race, stock, language and tradition with that already established here. The great American mill of social amalgamation had a pretty tough job even with these elements, but it was accomplishing the task.

Later, steamship and railroad, new lands to be sold, disparity in

wages, the astute ambition of European nations to get rid of their paupers and criminals, have combined to glut the mill with Bohemian, Pole, Italian, Armenian, Hungarian, Russian, not to speak of social dregs from western Europe, and not a few from the Orient, whose uncomprehended hosts are beginning to threaten us. The lump is becoming too big, too diverse and of too poor a quality to be easily leavened. In large portions we are no longer American, but anything you please. Whole populations here, ignorant, compact, autonomous,—consider German, Scandinavian, Polish, as truly the American language as English. Yet by accelerated processes of naturalization, these alien hosts become nominal citizens, and at the dictation of machine, of priest, of boss, cast the ballot they cannot understand and make laws for a nation.

Moreover these un-American swarms are not always distributing themselves upon the land, that common disinfectant of human grossness, but in large measure they are stagnating in the great centers, increasing their iniquities. America is to be the theater of enormous cities. Everything mechanical tends swiftly to this result. We deplore in New England the destruction of the country town by the draft to the cities. But statistics show that in the greater States of the Interior and West, the country town is suffering still more. The omnipotent congestive tendency of the city sweeps it off its feet before it can get fairly on them.

The popular notion of the Home Missionary is that he is always in a mining camp, in a new railroad station, in a village that is trying to be a city. But the fact is that the missionary often goes now, and more and more must go where the people go—to the great cities. His function must be, in increasing measure, as St. Paul's was, in them. He must get at these lower, alien forms of our population where they are, in a congestion already as acute and as dangerous as in the old world. No policy of our Society has been wiser than to find, inspire and ordain missionary prophets out of Scandinavians, Germans and Bohemians and support them in large cities among their own people.

It is not, however, our great area, nor the mixed, and in many cases degraded quality of our population, nor the congestion of our cities, nor the evil effects that are connected therewith, which constitute the most exacting appeal, the most significant opportunity for the modern Congregational prophet. These are enough, but there is more. It is certain formidable moral, or perhaps we might more appropriately call them immoral, tendencies of American life which most imperatively call for the magnifying of the prophetic function of missions. Here the degeneracy of the family and of family life and sanctions forces itself upon our attention as a most threatening evil. Degradation of ideal and practice at this point, as history abundantly proves, means swift degradation everywhere. Yet this is our peril. The apartment or tenement house; the enormous growth of club life; the doing business on wheels; the advent of women in commercial and professional life, disinclined to domesticity, independent, self asserting; familiarity with revolutionary

theories respecting the relation of the sexes; facility of divorce—all this is putting the home under severe strain.

Perhaps the worst result is not the rapid increase of crimes against chastity, startling as this is, but the absence of moral restraint in the home, the decay of family religion, the lack of true child nature, and the consequent religious ignorance, indifference, irresponsibility and impiety in which thousands of our youth are growing up. Deterioration here goes on with speedy progression. These irreligious youth, untaught in and contemptuous of the sanctities of the family, must soon be the fathers and mothers of another generation. What is the outlook for the home and for all the conserving influences of character and conduct which home signifies?

We are grateful that our Congregational and missionary genius has already evolved a true prophet of power among us to call the attention of the churches and the nation to the perils that threaten us in these attacks upon the family; but the prophetic function needs to be assumed and emphasized in this direction with trumpet tones by every Home Missionary, minister and layman in the land.

The modern prophet and missionary of the Lord has now to contend with an agency which at first was supposed to be one of his most valuable coadjutors, but which, depraved to devilish uses, has become one of his most powerful and insidious antagonists. I refer to the printing press which supplies immoral pictures and literature and which furnishes forth the sensational and vulgarizing newspaper—far worse in its heaps of grossness on Sundays than on other days—stimulating mercenary, irreverent, brutish and criminal instincts in thousands of our youth. Whence the reform of this de-civilizing agency is to come God only knows; but that there must be reform and regeneration or we shall relapse into barbarism, is plain enough. One part of the country is as badly off as another in this regard, and everywhere there is need of prophetic testimony on behalf of a purity, a judgment, a righteousness so salient and flaming that this evil shall be purged away.

The socialistic movements of the time have intense interest for the Congregational prophet and missionary, especially at the West. From the time of Pentecost, the point where Christianity has touched the matter of property has presented always the most difficult and delicate questions. It is so to-day. The air is full of threatening elements, and no one can tell in what form or in what direction they may combine in a storm of social revolution. Under the stress of competition, of new conditions created by invention, of new ambitions for a fuller life, the old problem of the distribution of wealth is keenly agitating myriads of minds. There is abundant confusion and there is great need of caution lest the ministerial and missionary prophet himself shall here be misled and misleading. One danger, however, is apparent. It is the fact that this agitation is, in large degree, characterized by materialism. The Gospel is interpreted, not in the spiritual terms of the kingdom of heaven, but in the cash values of the kingdom of earth. It is not the spectacle of the Cross, the great drama of divine unselfishness, but it is the distribution of the loaves

and fishes that attracts attention, and the figure of Jesus tends to be degraded from the sublime position of the divine Savior, revealing the infinite inheritance of eternal life to the soul, to the office of a social demagogue parceling out food and wages. Against all this misinterpretation of the Gospel, there is needed the firm, wise testimony of the prophet, urging the ancient plea on behalf of righteousness, justice and charity in the name of the Lord God Almighty who is both Judge and Savior of men.

Closely connected with this socialistic agitation, which concerns itself largely with bread and butter, there is the growth of an unchristian and lust-provoking luxury and the increase of gambling and the gambling spirit, which, in its various forms, many competent judges regard as beyond intemperance and licentiousness—far the most extended and pernicious evil of our times. The reason is that the gambling spirit touches all the business, and so all the legislative and domestic life of all the nation. Its baneful influence is felt in all the maneuvers and permutations of a presidential campaign, and in the cost of every loaf of bread and of every pound of meat served on our tables. It discourages honest industry, fosters the passion to live by one's wits, defies law, gives a kind of cynical, shallow and desperate tone to society, and inflames the minds of millions with the thirst for sudden riches.

It is no wonder that these evils are reflected in our politics and state and national legislatures, where there seems to be little principle, or morality, and where the gravest issues are discussed and settled from the standpoint of the jobber and mercenary. In our disappointment and indignation at Congress and our public men, we need to reflect that they are but exponents of tendencies hidden deep within the people themselves which nothing but the vision of a righteous and judging God, mediated through the voice, the life, the moral leadership of his consecrated people and self-denying prophets can cure.

An even more marked disclosure of the imperative need of the missionary prophet is to be found in the frightful increase of crime in our country within the last decade. Notwithstanding the augmenting extent and thoroughness, as a system, of our public schools; notwithstanding an apparently enhanced interest and activity in philanthropy; in the face of all the missionary efforts of the various Christian bodies, and the operations of such organizations for moral and religious improvement as the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, the Young People's Endeavor Societies and the Salvation Army, in spite of all this, crime in general, even in the most favored States, has increased in a much greater ratio than the population. As a single fact recently brought out by Mr. White and worth repeating, it appears that the homicides in the United States increased from 3,567, in 1889, to the enormous number of 10,500, in 1895, or in round numbers from 58 murders in 1,000,000 inhabitants in 1889, to 155 murders in 1,000,000 in 1895.

In no civilized community on the face of the globe is life so unsafe as in this country. We are accustomed to think of Italy as the

region of the bandit and assassin; and indeed the proportion of murders to the population is greater in Italy than in any European country, but it is vastly greater in this land of ours where, as the same authority has pointed out, we must make up our minds to the grim certainty that within a year from now nearly 11,000 people will, unprepared, suffer violent death at the hands of the manslayer, who in some places terrorizes over the whole population, besides figuring as a hero in the imagination of thousands.

Put along with this these two facts: first, that in many communities—east and west—there is no ministration of the Gospel whatever, no Sunday-school, nor moral instruction, no missionary prophet of duty and righteousness, because churches have become so apathetic that missionary societies have no money to support him; and second, the extravagant and sordid expenditures at weddings and feasts made in recent months by ostensibly Christian people; and do you not think that there is a call, such as never before existed in this country, for laying emphasis upon that old Hebrew type of prophesying of judgment and righteousness which made Isaiah and all the rest the mighty witnesses of Jehovah in their day?

There is, however, an even more significant aspect of these ghastly statistics of murder. More alarming than their number last year is the fact that only 132, out of the 10,500 murderers, were legally executed for their crimes, while in the same year there were 171 done to death by lynching. Law is set at naught in both directions. The sentiment and hand of stern, sober, certain justice are beginning to be fatally weakened among our people, and the sway of lawless passion—sure sign of barbarism—increases. One murderer in 45 was legally executed in 1890; in 1895 only one in 74. Meantime life imprisonment for this crime has become almost a farce. If all murderers who have been thus sentenced during the last six years were now in confinement there would be 42,000 of them; but the 11th census shows only 7,351 so confined. The remainder, subtracting the dead, have been weakly pardoned, and the majority of them are now at large, living witnesses of the degradation into which have fallen that Anglo-Saxon sense of justice and respect for law which once were our pride and the guarantee of our stability.

But some one may ask me, What has this enumeration of current evils and these statistics of murder to do with the seventieth anniversary of a Society whose main object is to establish churches and support missionaries? Much, every way. Our country is not to-day what it was in 1826. Its conditions and needs are not the same. The church, her theology, her point of view, the way she is regarded, have changed. The battle that is now on is different. We ourselves are on trial. As to the final issue—that is, that Christ's kingdom shall prevail here—we may have no doubt; but the question is, shall we be able to meet our particular responsibility, and, if so, how?

Perhaps the most immediate field for missions is the church itself. Perhaps it is not so much new churches as old churches made new that we want; not so much more laymen and ministers, as better ones.

By the severity of our tasks, God is testing our faith. The swift and gigantic movements of our civilization are his anvil and hammer wherewith he is shaping us. Never since Pentecost had the church such resources, such insights, such opportunities as are ours here and now. Never had the prophet, the preacher, the missionary such advantage, such a field, such weapons, such rewards. We have whole populations to instruct in the very elements of morality. We have swarms of voters to educate and kindle with patriotic duty. We have the channels and vast resources of modern business to purify and consecrate with enthusiasm for goodness. We have legislatures, courts, councils, schools and the institutions of orderliness to ground and influence, so that they may become the bulwarks of rectitude, sobriety, honor and the fear of God. Shall we conceive it to be our purpose, with denominational zeal, merely to increase the number of our churches or enlarge the list of our communicants? We have entire communities to regenerate and inspire with high ethical ideals and aims. It is as the agents of a fresh interpretation of the kingdom of God, a clearer vision of Christ, a new moral awakening and reformation to which by all our traditions we are pledged. Everywhere there is doubt, restlessness, hunger, expectation, for some more compelling dynamic of righteousness. We must meet this desire. God's call to us is revealing our own spiritual poverty. We say we want more thorough organization, more money, more men. Yes, indeed, more men of ability, of culture, of consecration; more money, not given stingily in drops and driblets, but poured lavishly out in abundant streams; more organization, more direct contacts, more superintendence on every field. More organization, more money, more men we imperatively need. But, alas! these are not causes, but effects. Back of them, and that we may have them, we want ecclesiastical regeneration. From this shall spring not only money, but the prophetic word of God's truth—"quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword"—in the life and on the lips of countless witnesses—missionaries, ministers, teachers, laymen—able, learned, progressive, discerning, austere, sympathetic, self-denying, in whom—"your sons and your daughters"—that Word shall again become flesh to work the miracle of the apostolic years.

Let us not deceive ourselves. We have reached in this Society a scriptural fullness of age. Our past is a shining record, magnifying most of all the preacher's office, upholding, through thousands of devoted men,—whose names are like stars—the highest, most progressive, most spiritual ideals in education, reform, conduct, theology, religion. We may be relatively small in numbers. Never mind. Our energy and thought may have largely gone to the support of other bodies. Let us rejoice in this. It is honor enough to play the part of prophetic teacher, missionary, inspirer, for one's times. But on this crest of seventy years of splendid intellectual, moral, and spiritual service for a continent, we shall make a mistake if we do not see that what we have been and done requires us to be and do more; that the civilization we have helped to create has a

new summons for us; that upon family, school, college, church, gathering force from fresh insight into the heart of the Gospel, interpreting anew human needs and hopes, and developing hidden resources to meet them, must come a mighty enthusiasm for testimony to Christ, for prophesying his grace, for preaching—or we shall be unworthy of our day.

There are certain tendencies of our American—I might almost say of our Congregational—Christianity, which while susceptible of direction towards good, yet threaten to become productive of evil, because they are likely to become enemies of the best and to incline us to substitute show for substance.

One of these is our strong imitative and gregarious instinct—the disposition to run after novelties, to crowd into greater assemblies, and in the tumult of speech-making, song, and flutter of handkerchiefs, to imagine that we have brought in the Kingdom. This habit grows on us. It is fostered by the newspapers, the hotels, the facility of travel and the modern love of change and publicity. It would ill become me unduly to disparge such gatherings. But may we not overrate their moral effect? There is often too much of the picnic about them. A mob itself, even a religious mob, seldom profoundly impresses. It seldom itself originates or delivers an uplifting, convicting prophetic word. It does not create leadership. It does not teach. It needs to be taught. The man who teaches it must himself be more than its product. He must learn his message alone with God at the burning bush like Moses; in the desert like the Baptist; on the mountain of temptation and transfiguration like the Christ; in Arabia like St. Paul; in his monk's cell like Luther; in his mission at Stockbridge like Edwards. Then, under his lead, the Christian assembly may develop more than an ebullition of pious sentimentality. It may become in all its parts the organ of righteousness and righteous conduct. If our Christianity is to become herd-like and co-operative, as now seems inevitable, there is the more need of the prophet who alone has face to face become acquainted with God and seen the divine glory.

Connected with this herding instinct and its craze for contact and ubiquity, is the lust for entertainment which has infected our Congregational Christianity. It shows itself in craving for extravagant music, for meaningless liturgical embellishment, for the establishment of the church kitchen with its accessories of games and fairs. It reveals itself in the advent of the stereopticon in the pulpit and in the somewhat exaggerated demand that the church shall become "institutional"—that, is do everything that the workshop, club and amusement hall can do.

In some cases doubtless and within limits this may become subservient to the prophetic word—to doctrine, to reproof, to correction, to instruction in righteousness—but if it be substituted for that word, it is a delusion and a snare. Consult the deepest heart of the people and you will find that, however much they may be tickled by this tinsel, they want something more. The church and its ministry on the western frontier and in the eastern city, in the rude mining

camp, and on the aristocratic avenue, are alike, if they are good for anything, to be fulfilling this word of Joel: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Use what tool you will, so long as you do not worship it, but remember you are everywhere and by all means to be missionary, prophetic, the God-appointed speaker, instrument, witness of moral and spiritual things, of divine judgment, mercy and truth. If the church and her members give up this holy and thrilling office to serve tables and manage peep shows, no one will discharge their peculiar duty for them.

Again philanthropy in the Christian community is now in some directions so overworked that it has become diseased, flabby, sentimental and pernicious. Reacting from severe Puritan ideals it has grown soft-handed and materialistic, concerned often not so much with man as with his body; not with eradicating ignorance, implanting impulses towards goodness, and transforming character by regeneration, and conduct by discipline, but with foolishly seeking to do away with the bodily suffering which is the salutary reward of iniquity. This false philanthropy creates a sentiment in which crime flourishes. It leads silly people to make a hero of the bank robber, highwayman and murderer, and, aided by sensational newspapers, to pamper with flattery and flowers the vampires of society.

Religion and the ministers of religion are responsible for no small share of this nonsense. They often forget their office. They should preach from the Old Testament as well as the New. They are to be the conservators and directors for the people of a determined and righteous indignation against wrongdoing. They are set for judgment as well as mercy. They are to clarify philanthropy by making known the terror as well as the grace of God, not with any appeal to the discredited dogmas of future arbitrary retribution, but as Isaiah did, with the seen and unavoidable proof which life, history, and, in these modern days, science furnish, that the man, the community, the nation which is unrighteous, and condones unrighteousness, and mocks God, shall perish — perish now and perish everlastingly.

In view of these questionable tendencies of some of the most prominent movements of our modern Christianity; in the face of the evil, the materialism, the restlessness, the doubt of our times, we, as Congregational churches, can have no self-respect, can claim no decent place, cannot begin to meet our opportunity, except as under the power of a Nineteenth Century Pentecost, we have a fresh experience and reincarnation of Christ, and realize that everywhere and by all instruments our supreme function is to deliver personal, believing, prophetic testimony on his behalf. This is our open secret: the rediscovery and application to our own day of the ancient mission of the Apostolic Church; experiencing, witnessing, prophesying of the power and grace, the righteousness and redemption of God in Jesus.

This, I take it, is the one distinctive office of this, to-day, venerable, but ever useful Society of ours. It is not, as many of our people seem to think, quite independent of them, an appendage to the churches, good enough for those who care for that sort of thing,

but no affair of theirs. We must get rid of this vicious notion. If the Society is anything and is good for anything, it is all the churches organized for prophecy by personal cross-bearing.

Not the Secretaries in New York or the missionary on the frontier, but your "sons and your daughters," your business men with their money, your rich women by their self-denial, your college students by their consecration, your ministers by their readiness to take obscure places for small pay, your fathers and mothers by their hallowing of home—all these, as parts of one organization, shall prophesy.

We must get beyond the mischievous idea that the sole object of our Society is to plant new churches and sustain missionaries in them. It is quite as much to rouse old churches, to drag out their latent energies, and to set aflame with prophetic zeal the ministers who preach in them. We must revise our imperfect conception that our Society is chiefly an agency for evangelizing the ungodly West, the moral destitution of which is sometimes painted in such vivid colors as to provoke reply and resentment. This is all a mistake. Doubtless the population beyond the Mississippi need the Gospel badly, but we cannot sustain Christ's cause by magnifying the mote in the western eye and forget that it is there largely because of the beam in the eastern eye. If the West needs the prophetic word, the East needs it not one whit the less. If a struggling little school in Utah needs it, the great university in New England needs it, too. In point of fact, of the 2,000 missionaries under our commission last year, about one-quarter were in New England, and one-half were east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio. Were they not needed?

But this is not the point. The reflexes of missions are among their most valuable results. "He that watereth others shall be watered also himself." The church perishes when it ceases to prophesy. Unless it is beholding first hand the vision of the once crucified and now living Christ; unless it is incarnating him in all its thought, feeling, purpose, activity; unless it thus out of its own experience and by its own cross, has a direct message of redemption to deliver to its fellow men, they will spue it out of their mouths.

Home Missions! Say to the rich at the East that it is not merely for the sake of the destitute at the West, that we ask for a few of the chips and shavings of their wealth, but it is for their own sake also, lest their riches drown them in destruction and perdition. Say to the cultured young men and women of our colleges that it is not alone for the sake of the ignorant that we ask for the free consecration of their rare gifts on the altar of Christ, but for their own sakes also, lest in their pride and vanity they miss their opportunity and perish from his presence at the last. Say to the cities that it is not chiefly for the country that we beg their assistance, but for their own sakes, lest surfeited and unfruitful they become like Babylon.

Home Missions! The minister who preaches to his rich, fashionable, self-satisfied congregation at the East and warns them of the perils of unconsecrated wealth until he forces them for very shame of themselves and for the love of Jesus to make that wealth prophesy, is as true a Home Missionary as the man who exhorts cowboys and

miners at the West to amend their lives according to God's commandment.

"Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Not here and there a lonely seer on his watchtower, but everybody telling the splendid story with burning lip; telling it with a faith and passion that transform all life; this is the ideal, this the vision, my brethren. Is it not time for us to expect the fulfillment of this word? The barriers are all down. The light of life streams through the breaking up of old systems. The crucified Jesus is again stirring with hope the dead world. A new day of triumph is dawning on the waiting church. "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Fulfill for us, O Holy Ghost, this ancient promise, till from East to West and West to East the pentecostal flame shall run, reviving, kindling, consecrating us all as prophets of the Lord Christ! Amen.